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CURRENT LITERATURE.

PRESENT TENDENCIES IN THE GERMAN DRAMA AND NOVEL.

From now on regular reports upon current developments in German literature will appear in this place. It is not deemed necessary to defend this departure, as philology is not opposed to life, although it largely deals with what is dead to the feeling and the thought of those now living. It is self-evident that the philological methods employed in studying the past can be applied only in a very limited degree to the work of living authors, but we may do what the profoundest scientific investigators of a future period may not be able to accomplish, we may appreciate and enjoy the labors of the men and the women of our own time. We may not find the true perspective, but we may be deeply moved by their struggles and be lifted up by their aspirations and their ideals, undisturbed by the thought that a future generation may by scientific measurement prove that all this present life lacks the elements of real greatness. We cannot know whether contemporary literature is great or not, nor need we concern ourselves with this point, for by a natural law all that is near us is of peculiar interest and value to us.

The last few years have brought us a number of good German books. Not only their quality but also their common tendency is significant, especially in the drama. The recent appearance of two such beautiful and idealistic dramas as Lienhard's *Wieland der Schmied* and Wildenbruch's *Die Lieder des Euripides* accompanied by the rather cool reception of Sudermann's *Stein unter Steinen* and the half-hearted approval of Hauptmann's *Und Pippa tanzt* confirms the impression gained also from other signs that we are approaching a turning point in the development of the drama. Since the remarkable season of 1889-90, when Hauptmann and Sudermann aroused such wide interest by their *Vor Sonnenaufgang* and *Die Ehre*, the dramatical output has largely

been dominated by these two men and the general naturalistic tendencies they represent. Everywhere arose young enthusiastic men girded about with a holy zeal to defend these naturalistic principles. However much they differed among themselves, they all had a strong sense for the real and an intense interest in the actual conditions of modern life. Even Wildenbruch, so different by natural temperament, now and then fell into the same trend. The beautiful language of Goethe and Grillparzer was replaced by the plain and natural speech of every day, often even by dialect and the mere stammerings of excited people. Throughout the entire nineteenth century there is a steady growth of the sense for the real, but these first dramatic productions of Hauptmann and Sudermann appearing at an opportune moment and presented so earnestly with the ardor of youth and hope seemed to the young new revelations and were received as such. Of course, these two champions of the real were, on the other hand, fiercely attacked by older and more conservative men. Hauptmann and Sudermann, however, proceeded on their way undisturbed by this opposition. Others as Halbe, Schnitzler, Hartleben, Dreyer, Beyerlein have also gradually won for themselves a place in the sympathies of the public. Of these, Hartleben after obtaining a flattering success with his *Rosenmontag*, has been called away by death. All of these young men were received more or less warmly by certain classes of young people and each had his ardent admirers. To this group may be added other dramatists, as Georg Engel, Georg Hirschfeld, etc., who have found friends and supporters. They all, the little and the large men, were in a certain sense conquerors, in that they won new realms for literature by devoting themselves to special fields of observation. The very claim of these men that they were presenting, not themselves, but actual phases of human life almost disarmed criticism in certain influential circles, for the search after facts is the vital principle of scientific investigation which characterizes our time. To many others literature seemed about to embrace life and thus about to become one of the great popular forces of the new age. A great number, led on by the strong hopes of these dramatists and their critical supporters, endeavored to enter sympathetically into these special dramatical studies. The enthusiasm and public favor became at times almost unbounded. Now, however, after more than a decade has passed away, these scenes of actual life, often so

sad, or disgusting, or revolting and on the other hand often so devoid of every uplifting force, begin to tire the public and the people, sick of the realities that meet them everywhere in their own experiences, are eager to escape what once seemed to be the only proper theme of literature—pictures of actual life. A new group of literary men have sprung into prominence who have gained the sympathies of a large public by leading the thought away from the present and its realities and carrying it back into our earlier days, when hopes ran high and thought arose above the present towards the ideal regions of youthful dreamland and fancy. These pictures of youthful life have found a beautiful expression in a number of novels, especially Frenssen's *Die drei Getreuen*, Jörn Uhl, and *Hilligenlei* and Lauff's *Kärrekiek*. The last mentioned book is one of the truest pictures of idealistic youth-time that present literature affords. A sweet melancholy pervades it throughout and the lines are so faithfully drawn that by means of the gentle insinuating influence of the atmosphere of the story we gradually forget the hard realities of to-day and find ourselves again in our youth-time. We live over our old joys and old sorrows and at the close of the tale it is only with a reluctant feeling that we lay the book down to return to actual life. A number of other interesting books of this retrospective character are Wilhelm Fischer's *Die Freude am Licht*, Hesse's *Peter Camenzind*, Hollaender's *Der Weg des Thomas Truck*, Sommer's *Ernst Reiland*, Otto Ernst's *Asmus Sempers Jugendland*. Somewhat similar to these books is Baroness Heyking's *Briefe, die ihn nicht erreichten*, as we are also carried away from the present into the past life of another. Here it is not the life of buoyant young manhood conscious of its power, but it is the story of the hopes and fears of a gentle woman who cannot shape her own life, but must as a woman receive her destiny from the hands of another or the development of outward circumstances. There are such deep true tones of womanly feeling in the book that its influence will come to many as a benediction. That this recent prominent feature of retrospection in literature should take the form of the novel, not that of the drama, lies in the nature of the subject itself. The novel has for some time been kept in the background by the prominence of the naturalistic drama, but it is now having its turn and is receiving a large share of attention. The idealistic tendency so prominent in a number of these novels is also finding its way into

the drama as mentioned above. This is only natural, for the drama is an old well established stronghold of idealistic life. It may be quite premature to conclude from these few indications of the revival of the idealistic drama that naturalism will soon be displaced. Even if it should lose a good deal of its influence, it does not mean that it will lose its value to literature. After the storms of enthusiasm on the one hand and of prejudice on the other are past, this interesting phase of modern literature will be studied impartially and its real significance will become apparent. The lives of these men, especially Hauptmann and Sudermann, will become better known and the results will be brought into connection with their works and will add greatly to their value. How Goethe's *Iphigenie* and *Tasso* have gained by the profound study of the poet's life ! There are a goodly number of these naturalistic dramas that many students of recent German literature count among their richest experiences, for they, too, have experienced them along with their authors. Several of these works will probably become permanent factors in literature, for the achievements of such a pure and lofty striving borne up by the hopes of the youth of an age cannot be entirely lost, it is a part of the history of the age. Hauptmann has spoken things so true and so beautiful that several of his works may become a precious heritage to following generations. Criticism has been more severe upon Sudermann than upon his rival, but a more careful study of his life and his work will reveal much earnest and noble striving and will make the final judgment more favorable. We may despair too early when we predict the decline of these two leading writers simply upon the basis of the unfavorable impression received from their latest works. We expect them to fulfil every year the great hopes we entertained at the start and to write a great work every season, when Goethe wrote in his long life only five or six works of lasting beauty.

Closely connected with modern German naturalism in the drama is symbolism. Hauptmann, in *Die versunkene Glocke*, turned from the intense realistic scenes of modern life to the land of myth and wonder. He calls his work 'ein deutsches Märchendrama.' It seemed at first an abandonment of realism, but closer study reveals the old realistic aims, only in a symbolistic form, as if he would by means of the live concrete forms of fable and allegory be able to disclose more vividly the deep mystery of life. The success of this

work was pronounced. Later, he returned to the earlier realistic forms, but in the present year in *Und Pippa tanzt* he again employs symbolism. Another interesting symbolistic dramatist is Hugo von Hofmannsthal. His *Theater in Versen* is a collection of symbolistic dramas, which in spite of certain repulsive and unhealthy features contain striking beauties of a peculiar individual nature.

Although the future of naturalism in the drama is not secure, it has in another form come to stay, namely, in the so-called 'Heimatkunst.' Naturalism is a product of the city and at first busied itself almost exclusively with the evils of society and was thus in large measure negative, but its essential aim, that of representing faithfully the actual conditions of life as they are to-day, is distinctly positive and opens up a limitless field of work for the novelist. Every section of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland has peculiar conditions of society and culture and peculiar beauties of natural scenery that can never be exhausted. Here in the country sections men and women are healthy in both body and thought and young in hope, here there is a rich capital of human happiness and contentedness, a quiet, earnest activity in pursuit of modest attainable results which, if reproduced in the form of faithful pictures, will brighten and strengthen life to the tired and nervous people of the city. These pictures of 'Heimatkunst' differ materially from the older 'Dorfgeschichte' in that the author does not merely tell an interesting tale using a rural scene for the background, but will reproduce faithfully the life of his own home, as only he, the child of the locality can do, he who dreamed his boyhood dreams on its hillsides and rivers and laughed and cried, played and worked, suffered and hoped with its people. There is not a single section of Germany that has not its 'Heimatkunst.' The traveler that is hurled through the lowlands on a fast train and who later talks of the charmless German plain, must read works of the 'Heimatkunst' and learn from a genuine child of that section the long list of its beauties, its manifold sounds and sights and the bright life and high hopes of its people. The authors who have given to the life of their home a prominent place in their books do not belong to a clearly marked school, for often other distinguishing elements enter into their work. Hauptmann, classified above as a naturalistic dramatist, has in a number of his plays given us faithful pictures of life in his Silesian home. Thus 'Heimatkunst' plays a

rôle in different fields of literature and is destined to become even more prominent. Among the many writers who give us pictures of home life, a few are here mentioned : Rosegger for Styria in Austria, Timm Kröger, Bernhardine Schulze-Smidt, Max Dreyer, Jensen, and Frenssen for the North, Lauff and Clara Viebig for the West, Siegfried, Heer, and Lienert for Switzerland. Of their many interesting works we mention here a few, Siegfried's *Gritli Brunnenmeister* is a work of such simple classic beauty that it ought to become a favorite school text in our German classes. Lauff's *Kärrekiek* has been mentioned above and his *Frau Aleit* deserves mention here. On some other occasion this subject will be presented in fuller outline.

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NEUERE DEUTSCHE LITERATUR.

I.

In regelmässigen Berichten soll an dieser Stelle auf das Bedeutendste und Wichtigste hingedeutet werden, was die deutsche Literatur jetzt hervorbringt. Das ist keine leichte Aufgabe, wenn man die verwirrende Fülle von Publikationen bedenkt, die eben allwöchentlich den deutschen Büchermarkt überschwemmen, aber so schwer es auch sein mag, sich darin zurechtzufinden, so ergibt sich für uns doch ein grosser Vorteil daraus, dass wir ausserhalb aller der Strömungen und Bewegungen stehen, die sich jetzt mehr als je in der deutschen Literatur hervortun. Mit wenigen Ausnahmen gehört jeder, der künstlerisch und dichterisch schafft, einer bestimmten Richtung an, und es ist natürlich, dass auch die, welche kritisch über dieses Schaffen zu berichten berufen sind, gewissen ausgesprochenen künstlerischen Tendenzen huldigen. Von den grossen, der schönen Literatur wirklich dienenden Zeitschriften vertritt jede mehr oder weniger scharf ausgeprägt eine eigene literarische Richtung — die eine unter dem Deckmantel korrekter Objektivität und Unpersönlichkeit, die andere kampfbereit und mit offenem Visier. Um jede scharen sich die Schrift-